

Crowell Snags Former Intelligence IG Fired By Trump

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (February 17, 2021, 12:02 AM EST) -- Crowell & Moring LLP announced Wednesday it has brought on former U.S. Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael K. Atkinson as a partner, just under a year after Atkinson was fired by then-President Donald Trump, ostensibly for setting in motion his first impeachment.

The hire adds significant firepower to Crowell & Moring's white collar, internal investigations and national security capabilities. Atkinson, who will join the firm's Washington, D.C., office and co-lead its national security practice, served as chief watchdog of the nation's 17 intelligence agencies for approximately two years before he was fired in April.



Michael Atkinson

He snagged that job after a two-decade-long career in various senior roles in the U.S. Department of Justice, most recently as acting deputy assistant attorney general of the National Security Division.

Trump's dismissal of Atkinson drew criticism from Democratic lawmakers, who said it was retaliatory and a direct result of Atkinson's choice to hand Congress a whistleblower complaint, which led to an impeachment inquiry into Trump's actions around withholding military aid to Ukraine.

"Michael is one of the most recognized and accomplished federal prosecutors in the country and it would be hard to find someone more respected by his peers," Daniel Zelenko, chair of Crowell & Moring's white collar and regulatory enforcement group, said in a statement. "The credibility he has earned over the course of his career will be invaluable to our clients who face significant government exposure."

Atkinson is the firm's second high-profile white collar and regulatory enforcement hire within the last month. In January, it added veteran litigator Warrington Parker from Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP in its San Francisco office.

At Crowell & Moring, Atkinson will focus on white collar defense, internal investigations and complex civil litigation, the firm said. The national security practice he will co-lead advises clients on transactions under review by the federal government, export control matters, national security and False Claims Act investigations, as well as high-profile internal investigations.

"Michael's well-deserved reputation as an advocate for truth and having uncompromised integrity conducting highly-sensitive investigations positions him well to co-lead our growing National Security practice," Philip T. Inglima, chair of Crowell & Moring, said in a statement. "There are few prosecutors in the country with Michael's depth and breadth of experience in white collar prosecutions and national security matters. He knows how to effectively interface with critical constituencies for clients, including Congress, the intelligence community, and other state and federal enforcement agencies."

During his time in the government, Atkinson was one of the first — and remains one of relatively few — federal prosecutors to obtain jury trial convictions of individuals for violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the firm said. He also secured the convictions of two former congressmen.

There might never have been a **Ukraine investigation** if not for Atkinson, whose revival of the languishing whistleblower program paved the way for the complaint. And when the unnamed CIA operative's complaint reached Atkinson, he looked into it and determined it to be credible and of urgent concern.

The process required him to bring the complaint to acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguire. Atkinson's belief that the report was credible and serious obligated Maguire to share the complaint with Congress, but he didn't because of conflicting rules and pushback from the DOJ. So Atkinson himself notified Congress of the existence of the complaint, but did not turn it over, which ended up forcing the Trump administration to release it.

Prior to his government service, Atkinson was a partner at Winston & Strawn LLP.

In addition to welcoming the former Trump administration official, Crowell & Moring has not shied away from criticizing Trump.

Last month, it became the first major U.S. law firm to call for Trump's immediate removal ahead of President Joe Biden's inauguration, after Trump supporters attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6. Nineteen law firms followed suit in the days after the attack.

--Additional reporting by Lauren Berg, Bandon Lowrey and Andrew Kragie. Editing by Breda Lund.